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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SKOPJE 000792

SIPDIS

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STATE FOR EUR/SCE (PFEUFFER)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MK](#)

SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: PARLIAMENT BRAWL MARS RESOLUTION OF
STATE JUDICIAL COUNCIL STANDOFF

REF: SKOPJE 786

Classified By: P/E CHIEF SHUBLER, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) A brawl in parliament between MPs of ethnic Albanian DPA (governing coalition partner) and DUI (opposition) on September 25 overshadowed DUI's agreement to support a proposal (reftel) to break a long-standing deadlock on composition of the State Judicial Council (SJC), a key Macedonian judicial reform component. The brawl, which the Ambassador roundly condemned in a public statement and which appeared to have been provoked by DPA, nearly caused DUI to withdraw its support for the proposal. The September 25 incident was followed by protests later in the evening, during which purported DUI sympathizers clashed with police and some were injured. The following day, police reportedly beat a journalist covering police harassment of a DUI MP.

¶2. (SBU) Following strong international community pressure, PM Gruevski convened meetings of government and opposition leaders to discuss how to de-escalate tensions. In a later meeting with IC Principals, he pledged to take steps to prevent further violent incidents, to investigate the charges of police brutality against the journalist, and to form a parliamentary commission to investigate the September 25 and 26 incidents. Although the fabric of Macedonian democracy has been damaged by the incidents of the past several days, it is not torn; cooler heads now seem to be prevailing. Our key objectives over the next several days will be to support efforts to de-escalate tensions, and to keep government and opposition focused on completing composition of the SJC, an important NATO membership-related task. End summary.

DUI AGREES TO SUPPORT PRESIDENT'S PROPOSAL ON SJC...

¶3. (SBU) Following several days of coordinated lobbying by the Ambassador, EUSR, and NATO reps, DUI (ethnic Albanian opposition) President Ahmeti on September 25 told us he would support President Crvenkovski's proposal for completing the formation of the State Judicial Council (SJC), a key judicial reform component that has been deadlocked for nearly a year (reftel). Later that day DUI planned to state their position in favor of the proposal in parliament, followed by a press announcement to the same effect.

...THEN BRAWL ERUPTS IN PARLIAMENT

¶4. (SBU) Shortly before DUI VP Teuta Arifi was scheduled to speak in parliament to announce the DUI position, PDP MP Vejseli (formerly a DUI ally but now a governing coalition partner) gave a speech containing provocative language aimed at DUI MPs. Two DUI MPs responded and reportedly attempted physically to assault Vejseli (although DUI claims there was only an exchange of words on both sides). Other MPs intervened to prevent any fisticuffs. The President of Parliament then interrupted the session and called the parliamentary party coordinators to a meeting to discuss the incident.

¶5. (SBU) During the meeting of parliamentary coordinators, Arifi suggested continuing the parliamentary session the following day, once tempers had cooled. At that point, according to DUI accounts, DPA (ethnic Albanian junior governing coalition partner) President Thaci, DPA MP Matoshi, and Vejseli entered the room and began verbally abusing Arifi. When Arifi tried to leave the room, Thaci reportedly told her neither she nor her fellow party members would "leave alive," and physically accosted her. The President of Parliament and parliamentary security then intervened and a shaken Arifi was taken away to be given medical treatment for a heart condition.

¶6. (SBU) In the meantime, five of Ahmeti's bodyguards who were outside the parliament at the time were detained by police and taken to a police station for questioning, and Ahmeti's personal vehicle was impounded. A television reporter later claimed he had been hit by a DUI MP, and DUI alleged that a DPA MP had struck and knocked down a security guard. Another DUI MP reportedly was kicked repeatedly in the shins by a DPA member.

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SNATCHING DEFEAT FROM THE JAWS OF VICTORY...?

¶7. (C) During a meeting with IC POLADS (US, EUSR, NATO, OSCE) at the parliament after the incident, Ahmeti said DUI's support for the SJC compromise was now uncertain, since "the situation has completely changed." He reported that he had spoken earlier with PM Gruevski, who had told him he had asked DPA's Thaci to "calm things down." Ahmeti pledged that he would engage fully to calm the situation, but added that he could see no way ahead on the SJC matter. The IC POLADS urged Ahmeti to take the high ground by supporting the political compromise, thus preventing a victory for those who wanted the SJC proposal to fail and to lay the blame for such a failure on DUI's shoulders.

DUI RECONSIDERS, REASON PREVAILS

¶8. (SBU) In the meantime, the Ambassador spoke with Arifi to get her version of events, and also called the President of Parliament and the Minister of Interior to convey our concerns about the incident and to press them to ensure proper steps were taken to find and punish those responsible for the incidents. The Ambassador later released a statement strongly condemning the incidents, and calling on the appropriate authorities to ensure those responsible were held to account.

¶9. (SBU) Before ending the meeting with the IC POLADS, and after he had been briefed on the Ambassador's statement, Ahmeti met with senior DUI advisers and discussed whether to continue DUI's support for the SJC proposal. Returning to the meeting, he informed the POLADS that the party had decided to continue support for the proposal, but wanted strong IC support for other DUI priority agenda items, including implementation of the May 29 agreement and the Framework Agreement.

EVENING PROTESTS RAISE TEMPERATURES

¶10. (SBU) Later that evening, media and police sources

reported an attempt by roughly 100 alleged DUI supporters to stage illegal protests (ones for which no permit had been received) around the parliament. The purported DUI sympathizers, some of whom police claimed were armed, parked vehicles to block traffic near the parliament. There were several reported altercations between police, including much-disliked "Alpha" special police units, and the supporters; one police officer and several protesters were injured in the scuffles, according to DUI representatives and media sources. According to one OSCE report, the police deployed the Rapid Deployment Unit, trained for crowd control, too late to minimize chances of confrontations.

THACI'S ALTERNATE REALITY

¶11. (C) On September 26, the IC POLADS met with DPA's Thaci and PDP's Vejseli to convey the international community's disappointment and revulsion over the incidents of the preceding day. Vejseli stuck to his claim that DUI MPs had attacked him, while Thaci denied he had even been present during the reported altercation with DUI's Arifi (a claim SDSM VP Ivanovski later soundly refuted, citing party sources who witnessed the incident and also refuted by the President of Parliament, who was present during the entire incident between Thaci and Arifi.) Thaci expressed frustration at what he called the GOM's "tolerance of DUI activities," and blamed SDSM for having "masterminded" the entire incident. Nevertheless, he pledged he would issue a statement calling on his supporters to remain calm and to avoid provocative actions. He also said he would ask one of DPA's MPs to meet with a "moderate" DUI MP to try to establish lines of communication between the two parties.

PRIME MINISTER: A "RETURN TO CIVILIZED DIALOGUE"

¶12. (SBU) The Ambassador later spoke by phone with PM Gruevski, who said he planned to call a meeting of coalition party leaders to discuss the September 25 incident and the way ahead, after which he would meet with opposition party leaders. As DUI President Ahmeti was in an emergency meeting at the time with the DUI party presidency, Gruevski said he

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would be willing to meet with Ahmeti "anytime in the evening" or the following day.

¶13. (C) The Ambassador advised Gruevski to take decisive steps to ensure an end to the provocations and counter-provocations. She concurred with his plan to meet with the opposition leaders, but noted that -- had such dialogue existed earlier -- events would not have developed into the current situation. PM Gruevski assured the Ambassador that he wanted a "return to civilized dialogue in the parliament." At the Ambassador's request, he also agreed to meet with the IC Principals (US, NATO, EU, OSCE) later that evening to discuss the way ahead. During that meeting, the Ambassador reiterated the need to foster an environment conducive to political dialogue, and to take steps to prevent further violent incidents.

¶14. (SBU) Gruevski told the Principals that his top priorities over the next few days would be to prevent violent incidents inside or out of parliament, to urge the MOI to conduct a speedy inquiry into reports that a journalist had been beaten in the course of filming an incident involving a DUI MP (see below), and to support formation of a parliamentary investigative commission to look into the events of the past few days. He stressed that there could be no justification for violent behavior in the parliament, regardless of the provocation offered.

DUI DECIDES TO FREEZE, BUT NOT BOYCOTT, PARTICIPATION IN PARLIAMENT

¶15. (SBU) In the meantime, we received reports, later confirmed, of DUI MPs having been stopped and harassed by

police while en route to the DUI party presidency meeting. OSCE later confirmed reports that police had accosted a TV crew, and had beaten one cameraman, in attempt to confiscate film on which their actions had been recorded. DUI leadership later announced that they had decided to freeze DUI's participation in plenary sessions of parliament until an impartial report was issued on the events of September 25 and 26, demanded that a parliamentary commission be established to discuss the incidents, and called for a public protest in Skopje on September 28. DUI leaders stressed that the freeze on participation in plenary sessions did not constitute a parliamentary boycott, and that the party would re-engage in parliamentary activities after the report was issued.

COMMENT -- TENSIONS HAVE PEAKED, COOLER HEADS EMERGING

¶16. (C) Despite DUI's assurance that it will stick with its support for the SJC compromise proposal, it is unlikely at this juncture that the party will consent to supporting any government move to implement the proposal. Our goal now remains two-fold: to press all parties to exercise leadership and restraint in order to prevent further violence, and to keep government and opposition focused on moving ahead with the reforms Macedonia needs to complete to strengthen its NATO candidacy. The September 25 and 26 incidents have damaged but not torn the fabric of intra-ethnic relations and democratic systems here. We will work with our IC partners to try to keep the ethnic Albanian parties -- DPA/PDP and DUI -- from committing additional acts that could further jeopardize progress toward Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic goals. In the meantime, it appears that tensions reached their peak on September 25 and 26 and cooler heads are emerging. A key test of whether this is the case will be the behavior of police and demonstrators at the protest planned to take place at the Skenderbeg Monument in Skopje on September 28. We are urging DUI and DPA, as well as the Ministry of Interior, to exercise proper restraint.

MILOVANOVIC